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ABSTRACT

This paper highlights a project aimed at devising an appropriate training scheme for foreign language teaching assistants in Britain and encouraging as many universities as possible to adapt the scheme to their own institutional settings. The scheme entitled DOPLA (Development of Postgraduate and Language Assistants) originated at the University of Birmingham in England and has been extended, trialled, and tested over the past 3 years by a consortium of British universities. The program focuses on reflective practice. Sections 2-4 of the paper consider the theoretical basis of reflective practice and its application to the distinctive pedagogy of modern languages. Sections 5-8 show how these theoretical issues are embodied in the specifics of DOPLA training. Appended are: Small Group Teaching: Strategies for Dealing with Problems; Russian Lesson Worksheet; and Lesson Evaluation Sheet. (Contains 27 references.) (Author/VWL)

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1

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2

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Training Graduate Teachers and Foreign Language Assistants in UK Universities: A Reflective Approach

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1. Background

The rapidly changing context of British higher education, with its highly regulated system of quality performance-related research funding, external assessment of teaching standards, and evaluation of administrative procedures, has recently seen a number of significant developments in the field of modern languages. A substantial expansion of undergraduate student numbers without any comparable increase in resources has led to, among other things, the employment of considerable numbers of part-time or temporary language teachers. Prominent among these are foreign language assistants (FLAs) and graduate research students, usually referred to as postgraduates (PGs). While in several institutions the former (typically young native speakers from universities in France, Germany, Spain, and so forth) have traditionally been employed to provide small group "conversation classes," more and more language departments are tending to give their FLAs, especially the more experienced ones, greater whole group teaching responsibilities. Meanwhile, in universities with substantial research activity, PGs are being recruited, either on short-term teaching assistantships or on an hourly-paid basis, to cover undergraduate language classes, especially in the first two years of the standard four-year degree program.

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The relatively short duration of assistants' teaching contracts (often just one year) leads to a high turnover for the staff, and this, together with universities' increasing dependence on such "cheap labor," represents a potential Achilles heel in quality audits. Furthermore, following the recent creation of a national Institute for Learning and Teaching (see ILT 2000), a key recommendation of the Dearing Report on Higher Education (National Committee 1997) whose mandate was to promote the professionalization of all teaching staff in universities and to devise mechanisms for the accreditation of individual teachers, the PGs and FLAs are a group likely to come sharply into focus over the next few years. Throughout higher education there is, consequently, a growing acceptance of the need to provide training for all part-time or casual staff.

In recognition of this need, the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) has invested approximately $400,000 in a project aimed to devise an appropriate training scheme and to encourage as many universities as possible to adapt it to their own institutional settings. The scheme, entitled DOPLA (Development of Postgraduate and Language Assistants), originated in the University of Birmingham and has been extended, trialled, and tested over the past three years by a consortium of British universities consisting of the Universities of Bristol, Coventry, Leeds, Salford, Sheffield, and UMIST (the University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology). Each of these has worked with a small number of partners to disseminate the training model to a total of more than 35 British universities.

The program is based partly on contemporary approaches to the initial training of secondary school teachers in the UK and assumes that the reflective elements so important in such courses can be included even in much shorter term training for part-time, temporary teachers in university language departments. Sections 2–4 of this chapter consider the theoretical basis of reflective practice and its application to the distinctive pedagogy of modern languages. Sections 5–8 then show how these theoretical issues are embodied in the specifics of DOPLA training, providing an overview of the modular structure and a brief introduction to the program's key elements.

2. Reflection on Practice

The idea of reflective teaching dates back at least to Dewey (1933) and his contrast between "routine action" and "reflective action." The former is shaped by such influences as authority, tradition, and habit, as well as by the expectations and norms of institutions. Routine action is inflexible and static and is therefore unable to respond easily to changing situations and needs. Reflective action, on the other hand, is

characterized by a readiness to engage in regular self-appraisal and evaluation; it is necessarily flexible and analytic and entails an acceptance of the need for constant self-development.

Building on Dewey's ideas, Schön (1983, 1987) develops his concept of reflective practice for the professions. He starts from a critique of "technical rationality," which he considers the conception of professional knowledge that has been most influential in shaping Western thinking about the professions. On this view: "professional activity consists in instrumental problem solving made rigorous by the application of scientific theory" (1983, p. 21). Professional practice depends on and makes use of a clearly defined body of scientific knowledge which is systematic, fixed, and free from ambiguity, and professionals apply its general principles to specific problems in a clear hierarchy which Schein (1972, p. 39) describes as:

1. an underlying discipline or basic science from which practice develops;
2. an applied science from which day-to-day procedures and solutions derive;
3. a skills element which involves the performance of actions based on the basic and applied knowledge.

This hierarchy normally implies an institutional separation of research from practice, with the former—often university-based—seen as superior to the latter and consequently accorded greater academic status.

Schön distinguishes between the "high ground" of scientific work, such as laboratory-based research founded on objective and quantitative evidence, and the "swampy lowlands" of such professional work as education which features more subjective, interpersonal concerns and qualitative judgments. In contrast to the rigorous analysis of "technical rationality," these lowlands are complex and instinctive responses; they employ and depend on the knowledge inherent in everyday professional activity. Citing examples from architecture, design, music, counseling, and psychoanalysis, Schön suggests such "knowledge-in-action" is intuitive, spontaneous, and frequently intangible but does work in practice. From it can be developed a new epistemology of practice, variously called reflection-in-action, reflective inquiry, or learning through doing, in which practitioners regularly adjust their actions on the basis of direct experience:

> When someone reflects-in-action, he becomes a researcher in the practice context. He is not dependent on the categories of established theory and technique, but constructs a new theory of the unique case.

> . . . He does not separate thinking from doing, ratiocinating his way to a decision which he must later convert to action. Because his experimenting is a kind of action, implementation is built into his inquiry (Schön 1983, p. 68).

Such reflection-in-action can help to solve the inevitable "rigor or relevance" debate (1983, p. 42 and 1987, pp. 8–9), in which traditional approaches are criticized for a lack of practical relevance, while alternatives are thought to lack real substance. It is argued that if pursued systematically, reflective inquiry can be just as rigorous as the scientist's theoretical and technical research.

Another significant factor in the development of praxis-oriented conceptions of knowledge has been the increasing emphasis placed in recent times on experience in the learning process. The major influence here has been the notion of "experiential learning" advanced by Kolb (1984, p. 38), who defines learning as a process whereby knowledge is created through transforming experience.

3. Reflective Teaching

The ideas of both professional training and experiential learning have found much support among educational researchers and have become fundamental to work on teachers' thinking and on so-called "craft knowledge" (Calderhead 1988; Elbaz 1983; Rowland 1993). The specific notion of reflective teaching (cf. Zeichner and Liston 1996) has been particularly influenced by the contrast between "experiential knowledge" and "received knowledge" (Wallace 1991, p. 12). While the latter denotes those research-based theories, data, and facts generally accepted unquestioningly by education specialists, experiential knowledge is something teachers build up through their everyday practice, in which they are inevitably and continually involved in making decisions and judgments and in adapting their practice to the changing requirements of both the classroom and individual students in a way they could find difficult to justify according to scientific criteria. Schön's claim that professionals "display skills for which [they] cannot state the rules and procedures" (1983, p. 50) applies just as much to teachers, many of whose responses to a range of classroom issues are not subject to the application of research-based theories or received knowledge but often depend on feelings and intuitions. A reflective approach to training is thoroughly grounded in classroom practice and seeks to encourage teachers to think about their intuitive decisions, with the aim of consciously developing "knowing-in-action" and making this the basis of their evolving professional expertise.

A crucial contribution to this teacher-driven approach has been made by the action-research movement, which promotes the idea that teachers should be researchers of their own practice and that their teaching and curricular decisions should be shaped by questioning their pedagogy and by collecting data about their classrooms, specific teaching methods and learners' responses (see Elliott 1991; Kemmis and McTaggart 1988; McNiff 1988). In brief, this involves teachers in a continuous loop of planning, action, monitoring/observation, data collection, analysis, evaluation, and renewed planning. After reflecting critically on the evidence collected during classroom practice and evaluating results, teachers need to decide what changes are required to classroom policies before planning how these are to be implemented and returning to the start of the cycle.

With regard to initial teacher training, the traditional "craft model" of much professional education, whereby an apprentice or student is shown how to do it by a skilled practitioner and then has to copy this "master," is now seen as inappropriate in a society where skills and knowledge are changing so rapidly. The reflective approach turns the observation of an experienced teacher into something to be analyzed and reflected upon, rather than unquestioningly imitated. The insights thus gained are then linked in an appropriate way to the trainee's own teaching.

One of the more dramatic indications of the spreading influence of reflective practice on the world of education can be seen in the training of secondary school teachers in British university departments of education. Training there is now predominantly school-based; less than one quarter of teacher trainees' time is spent in the academic environment, and most of that is devoted to the pedagogy of their specific discipline, key educational legislation, and whole-school issues. With correspondingly limited opportunities for the traditional theoretical "input," reflection on practice, linked to a highly developed system of school-based mentoring, is widely seen as the best way to develop, evaluate, and refine teaching competences.

4. Language Teacher Training

How do these general theories of reflective practice relate to the training of language teachers? As Richards and Lockhart argue (1994), language teaching in many traditional training programs is seen as an applied science, namely, applied linguistics:

> The significant theory and knowledge base underlying teaching is presented during the campus course. The teacher's job is to apply this knowledge in the classroom. Once teachers enter teaching they are

> expected to master the more 'trivial' aspects of teaching, such as how to handle routine classroom techniques and procedures. Improvement in teaching comes about as teachers match their teaching more closely to the theories and principles introduced during their MATESL [master's degree in teaching English as a second language] (p. 202).

In this view, failure in teaching is to be put down to a novice teacher's inability either to understand the findings of applied linguistics or to put them into practice in an appropriate manner. This model of training insists that the findings on which practice depends can only be determined by those expert in the particular field, not the teachers themselves "on the ground." The resulting separation of research and practice is the cause of many teachers' discontent with what they see as remote theorists who fail to understand the realities of the language classroom. As a classic example of this, Wallace (1991, p. 11) cites the failure of the supposed language learning panacea of audiolingual or structural drill methodology based on scientific methods derived from a behaviorist understanding of language acquisition. The belief that language learning, like all other kinds of learning, is dependent on the formation of habits and that practice alone is sufficient for learning to take place betrayed an ignorance of real-life language use, of the fact that practice in the classroom is very different from "natural" language production, and led, despite widespread classroom teacher skepticism, to a generation of language learners being subjected to meaningless stimulus-response exercises. (One might add that, conversely, the separation of research and practice also leads some professional language education specialists to dismiss classroom teachers who show little or no interest in basing their practice on "sound" applied linguistic theory.)

This top-down approach to teacher development, involving a thorough theoretical grounding in applied linguistics, is to be contrasted with the bottom-up approach of reflective practice in which the ongoing process of critical reflection on classroom activity is fundamental to the development of practical knowledge about teaching. Rather than seeking to put into practice in an experiential vacuum the theoretical insights of phonology, morphology, second language acquisition, error analysis, and language testing, beginning language teachers need to draw repeatedly on the knowledge provided by reflection on their everyday teaching. They need to seek insights from their experience of implementing specific classroom techniques and procedures, such as differing methods of tackling foreign language texts in class, the use of audio versus video for work on pronunciation and intonation, inductive versus deductive grammar teaching, the teaching of vocabulary acquisition strategies, etc. They also need to draw on the

findings and insights resulting from observation of their teaching, as well as their own observation of both peers' and more experienced colleagues' classes. And finally, very gradually, they need to start formulating their own pedagogical theories. (For more on this approach to the language classroom, see Nunan [1989].) To do otherwise is to put the cart before the horse. The demands, strains, and tension of the early stages of teaching, especially in a discipline such as languages with its complex and evolving pedagogy, make it impossible for teachers to retain and make sense of the wealth of applied linguistic knowledge thrown at them on a typical training course. Such theoretical knowledge must rather spring from practical experience; it must, in part at least, be formulated by teachers themselves on the basis of their own insights into practice.

It is certainly the role of initial language teacher education to ensure that novice teachers have an appropriate mastery of the target language, are familiar with the relevant metalanguage, and have explored the main facets of teaching a foreign language. But above all else, such a course must provide teachers with the skills to examine their own teaching and to take responsibility for their own professional development which needs to be based on a continual process of reflection, reassessment, and renewal. Issues which *experienced* teachers might periodically wish to reflect on include:

- what their role as teacher is
- what beliefs they hold about learning and teaching
- how these beliefs shape the style of their teaching
- what their students think about learning and teaching
- how these views affect the way students learn
- what cognitive styles and learning strategies their students favor
- how learners interact in the classroom
- whether such interaction can be improved.

Beginning teachers, on the other hand, are likely to want to focus on more immediate issues, such as:

- how effectively they open and close lessons
- their control of timing
- how realistic their lesson plans turn out to be
- student involvement in the lesson
- the use of student groupings

- language use in the classroom (e.g., the amount of L2 versus L1 talk)
- the balance and blend of activities
- their grading of questions
- transitions from one activity to another
- the clarity of their instructions
- their use of the OHP/board and other equipment.

Critical reflection on these aspects of classroom practice is one of the principal means of evaluating the effectiveness of teaching, of discovering whether there is any discrepancy between what teachers teach and what learners learn, and, if so, of identifying aspects of current practice which need to be changed. Clearly, any changes subsequently introduced must in turn be monitored and evaluated, thus emphasizing the continuous nature of the reflective process.

5. The DOPLA Approach

Basing itself on these theoretical premises, the DOPLA training program provides initial training for language teaching assistants, tailored both to participants' severe time constraints and institutions' limited training resources. The program also acknowledges that several, if not most, participants are unlikely to become career teachers and therefore require support for their immediate, short-term classroom needs, while others hope to develop a career in higher education with extensive teaching duties and may thus have longer-term needs.

The program's aims can be summarized as:

- to equip teacher trainees with basic general teaching and assessment skills relevant to higher education
- to focus on the specific skills needed for foreign language teaching
- to encourage active reflection on practice in all areas of teaching.

The original course team decided to adopt both a procedural and a structural approach to reflective practice. On the one hand, individual sessions would be designed in such a way as to encourage the production of materials and lesson plans by trainees themselves, which would be followed by discussion, reflection, and feedback. On the other, the very structure of the course would be based on learning from classroom experiences, with three days of intensive initial training and related activities, after which teacher trainees would take their

first steps in the classroom over a period of about two months, and with a subsequent second short intensive course incorporating reflection on practice and further training.

Another decision made very early on was to integrate elements of generic training with subject-specific work. This is a fundamental and distinctive principle of the training concept, motivated in part by the frequently voiced criticism that standard generic staff development training lacks relevance to teaching within specific disciplines. Accordingly, the course team brought together expertise in both generic and language teaching skills: the first member of the team was an academic working in both the German Department and the Modern Languages Unit (language center); the second, a training officer from the Staff Development Unit; and the third, a trainer of language teachers for secondary schools from the School of Education. The national DOPLA program has followed this original model and seeks to encourage in all participating institutions an alliance between academic linguists and non-language staff developers or trainers in order to ensure that the training is relevant in subject terms and also educationally coherent.

One of the greatest difficulties facing anyone implementing a DOPLA-style program is the variety of both languages and teaching which one encounters in universities. Typically, trainees can be teachers of French, German, Italian, Japanese, Russian, or Spanish, to name just the most common. Furthermore, language teaching can range from "prose-translation" classes in one department to predominantly communicative FL-medium work with minimal translation in another; from *ab initio* (or beginners') work with some groups to advanced level work with others. There is often the added complication of certain FLAs being asked to work as providers of traditional, closely defined small group conversation classes and others being given greater autonomy in work with whole language classes; some PGs are further allocated non-language (e.g., literary) tutorial groups as well as language work. The solution to such diversity has been to design a flexible, modular training program, whereby all participants attend a number of core modules and selected supplementary modules relevant to their specific needs. The DOPLA program thus consists of the following:

Core Modules

- How Students Learn
- Small Group Teaching
- Experiencing a New Language
- Teaching Grammar
- Working with Authentic Materials

- Understanding Language and Language Learning*
- Assessment
- Language-learning Strategies*

*Reader modules

Supplementary Modules

- Translation as a Learning Process
- Approaches to Literary and Cultural Studies
- Ideas for Communicative Work at Advanced Levels
- Techniques for Using Video and Audio Materials
- Using Information Technology in Language Learning
- Application of Computer-assisted Language Learning Packages
- Working as a FLA in the British Education System
- The Culture of British Higher Education*

*Reader modules

Institutional variety means that no two realizations of DOPLA training are likely to be the same; even the same module, while following the structure laid out in the training manual, may well introduce slight variations to meet local needs. Nevertheless, in spite of such diversity, the program is held together by a number of fundamental principles which all courses need to adhere to when adapting the training. These are:

- a two-part course, the first devoted to intensive initial training
- a subsequent period of classroom practice
- a second part combining reflection on practice and further training
- over the program as a whole, a combination of generic and subject-specific training
- within each training session, short-focus trainer input linked to group-generated output
- regular opportunities for teacher trainees to produce sample materials or lesson plans
- opportunities for participants to evaluate the program.

Teacher trainees, like all learners, can acquire knowledge in a variety of ways: they can listen to lectures, read handouts and books; they can also acquire it through discussion, brainstorming techniques, and carefully structured question-and-answer sessions. All of these approaches are employed in the DOPLA program in one form or another. The key is variety, so that different "channels" are employed to address the needs of trainees with differing learning styles—just one way in which the training seeks to be "self-reflective," i.e., demonstrating *through the mode of training itself* how classroom practitioners should approach their task (Woodward 1991).

In fact, the reflective practitioner model informs the delivery of individual sessions as well. Essentially, the pattern is to provide input lasting 30–50 minutes, during which time the trainer conveys the main principles of the particular topic. Participants are then asked to immediately put these principles into practice in a workshop situation by applying them to sample learning materials or different aspects of language.

In line with Bruner's "heuristics of discovery" (1965), the theory underpinning these workshops is that teachers should be able to tackle problems in general rather than just learn to cope with a specific one. Trainees are here engaged in an activity which involves them in discussion of teaching points presented as problems that need to be solved. For example, groups are given a text and are asked to exploit it for some specific learning purpose using their general experience or background knowledge (cf. discussion of Session 1 below), or they are asked to think of how to teach a grammar point in their particular target language. This may involve working in either cross-language or language-specific sub-groupings, depending on the task set. The results of groups' deliberations are subsequently pooled in a plenary during which a spokesperson for each group makes a presentation using a flip chart or overhead projector, with trainees providing feedback on each presentation. The lesson plans and lists of ideas are then typed up and distributed to all course participants along with handouts provided by the trainers, with which trainees can compare their own ideas (see Doff [1988] for more on this approach). Through these workshops, participants gradually build up a substantial collection of teaching strategies, techniques, sample lesson plans, checklists, and materials, which can be put into more or less immediate effect in their teaching.

6. Generic Training Modules

The first module, "How Students Learn," is fundamental to the whole program and will therefore be presented in some detail. It introduces

teacher trainees to a number of key principles for effective learning, linking generic issues common to all disciplines with those specific to teaching modern languages. The session begins with an overview of students' concepts of learning, presented as a hierarchy:

1. learning as a simple increase of knowledge;
2. learning as memorizing;
3. learning as acquiring facts or procedures to be used;
4. learning as making sense;
5. learning as understanding reality.

The purpose of this overview is to suggest that university work is ultimately concerned with helping students articulate subject understanding at levels 4 and 5. It is also emphasized that this is a long, drawn-out procedure, that integrating new knowledge into existing knowledge is a slow business: language teaching, especially, has to be recursive and repetitive in order to take account of these "loops" of learning with their starts and stops, their gains and losses.

The second key principle presented here, which runs as a leitmotif throughout the program, is the distinction between surface and deep approaches to learning (Biggs 1987; Chalmers and Fuller 1996, pp. 6–8). Students employing a deep approach are motivated by interest in the subject matter, not by fear or exams; their intention is to reach an understanding of the meaning of the material being presented, not to engage in rote learning. Students using the deep approach ultimately gain knowledge of broad principles supported by a sound factual basis, rather than only knowledge of mere facts and superficial understanding. Trainees are shown how all study, including language learning, has moments of both surface and deep learning (e.g., students need to memorize vocabulary and structures before they can express themselves freely in the target language) and that the teacher's role is to employ classroom strategies to bring the two together fruitfully, with the overall aim of allowing surface elements to lead towards deep learning, at which point the student starts to make sense of what he or she has learned and sees how things fit together. In languages, this means ensuring that the learning process incorporates purposeful, communicative language use and takes into account the students' desire to express meaning on subjects and for purposes which matter to them. Trainees are then introduced to a number of techniques and approaches that encourage deep learning.

The surface-deep contrast serves once again to illustrate the self-reflective nature of the training program. The very approach adopted by the trainers, namely, actively involving trainees in the sessions, linking tutor input to trainee output, and creating clear motivational contexts ("How will you cope with this problem when you confront it in your teaching in five days' time?") are illustrative of deep learning in action—a case of practicing what one preaches. Through these methods and through conscious reflection on why the trainers are employing them, trainees develop an understanding of the meaning underlying the pedagogical theories, ideas, and techniques being presented and demonstrated in the course.

Closely linked to this surface-deep dichotomy is the discussion of effective learning with its four main characteristics:

1. active learning (students posing their own questions and seeking the answers);
2. integrated learning (learning applied to a variety of subjects concurrently; learning applied in the context of real-life situations);
3. cumulative learning (sequenced learning experiences that become progressively more complex and challenging);
4. learning for understanding (having appropriate opportunities to reflect, receive feedback, and link to practice).

This leads to the heart of the module, as the key elements of effective teaching identified by Biggs (1989) are elaborated. With regard to the teaching of languages, these elements might be presented as follows:

- building on a well-structured knowledge base (starting from where the students are; initial diagnosis of ability/linguistic proficiency and consequent tailoring of tasks; frequent revision and reinforcement)
- providing a motivational context (personalizing language learning; ensuring relevance; provoking personal interest; encouraging integrative and, where appropriate, instrumental motivation)
- ensuring learner activity (limiting passive listening; stimulating through active involvement; task-based learning, learning through doing)
- facilitating interaction with others (organizing students in pairs and small groups; maximizing target language use; project work with exchange students; more general contact with native speakers).

In many ways the whole DOPLA training is built around these four pedagogical tenets, and subsequent modules refer back to them repeatedly, emphasizing the close link between the generic and the subject-specific elements of the program. Throughout the program participants are encouraged to look for exemplification of general teaching principles within their own subject areas, and thus messages concerning student interaction and involvement, the need to stimulate, challenge, and provide opportunities for creative work within meaningful, relevant contexts are introduced into modules on such diverse topics as grammar, translation, the use of authentic texts, and the use of video.

Following the tutor input is a workshop in which participants are divided into non-language-specific groups and given a selection of English language texts. (Owing to the linguistic diversity of participants, English is always used as the common language for illustrative purposes.) Using these texts, trainees are asked to devise teaching strategies and language learning activities that exemplify the four key elements of effective learning and teaching and that encourage students to adopt a deep approach. The groups' deliberations are recorded on flip-chart paper and displayed. Each group then elects a member to talk the class through the group's ideas and explain the thinking behind them, leading to whole-group discussion. The sheets are subsequently typed up and distributed.

The same format is adopted for the second module, entitled "Small Group Teaching." The tutor input briefly presents the findings of research into learner groupings and student likes and dislikes, looking at types of grouping and methods of teaching small groups. It further emphasizes the importance of listening skills in teaching, presents strategies for questioning, and runs through the different types of questions (probing, reflective, open, closed, etc.), explores why questions may not produce answers and what to do about it, and provides hints on how to explain things and ways to respond to students. The session also includes reflection on and discussion of strategies for dealing with typical classroom problems (the accompanying handout is reproduced as Appendix 1). Again, this module is fundamental to the whole training program, as the ideas presented inform almost all the subsequent language-specific sessions; indeed, the structure and design of the latter are intended to embody and exemplify the techniques recommended here.

7. Language-specific Modules

The language-specific component of the course begins with an introductory lesson in a language unknown to the majority of the participants. Institutions can choose any language for this purpose, depending on the make-up of the particular group of trainees, although the DOPLA pack provides a Russian lesson on video as standard. The aim is to put the teaching assistants back into the position of language learners, thereby demonstrating to them both the difficulty of learning a (new) language and the range of techniques that can be used for *ab initio* teaching.

The rapid expansion in non-specialist, or institution-wide, language learning in UK universities over the past decade has meant an increase in the amount of *ab initio* language teaching being carried out. In practice, most of such teaching is allocated to graduate assistants and other part-time staff; hence the issue is a central one for the DOPLA program. However, although the specific methodology has immediate relevance for those who will be teaching beginners, the general pedagogical principles which emerge from the module "Experiencing a New Language," most notably the need for careful sequencing, graded questioning, modeling, repetition, practice, and reinforcement, are relevant to teachers at all levels.

The lesson is set up to reflect the aims of interactive language teaching. It is conducted entirely in the target language with the support of realia and pictures, and content is chosen to reflect a genuine purpose: the students are taught to greet each other and introduce themselves, then to order tea and coffee with the appropriate mixture of milk and sugar. There is a gradual build up of material from individual words to short phrases, and then to questions and answers which eventually merge to form a short dialogue that students practice and perform in pairs. Repetition and carefully staged question and answer techniques are used throughout to ensure maximum participation. No written support is given, partly because in Russian (or Japanese, etc.) it would be of little help to a beginner, and partly to demonstrate the demands which language learning places upon memory and the difficulty which even highly skilled and motivated linguists experience in recalling linguistic items. Subsequent analysis of the lesson (see Appendix 2 for the accompanying worksheet) encourages trainees to identify the techniques used and to chart their own progress, but also to discuss their feelings throughout the process, which generally progress from anxiety owing to complete absence of comprehension to eventual enjoyment and satisfaction with their achievements. The guide questions on the worksheet also help to establish the link with the generic elements of the program introduced in the module "How Students Learn."

Considerable attention is paid in the course to grammar, as this is likely to be one of the common factors in participants' teaching.

"Teaching Grammar," in which participants are shown how grammar can be taught in context using the target language, is therefore one of the program's core modules. After a brief introduction to the role of grammar within contemporary approaches to language teaching, participants watch a video of an advanced French grammar lesson, during which the use of the subjunctive after certain phrases is introduced/reviewed and built into a communicative activity. The lesson is analyzed in terms of its adherence to the key features of learning and the essential features of language teaching which have been raised in earlier sessions. Trainees then participate in an activity demonstrating the teaching of a point of advanced English grammar (the modal expression "should have" + past participle). Finally, they divide into language-specific groups with the task of identifying a grammatical item in the language they teach which might present difficulties for learners, and planning a lesson to introduce and practice it. This plan is then presented to the whole group and all lesson plans are collected for subsequent duplication and distribution.

A closely linked module is "Working with Authentic Materials." This session demonstrates and rehearses a range of interactive and communicative activities that can be adapted to reinforce language learning at any level, but which are especially relevant for teachers working with the authentic texts featured in most advanced university language courses. First of all, a tutor explains the communicative approach to language teaching and the need for both communicative and pre-communicative work. Next, participants are given a pre-communicative task to perform, based on the video of the French class seen in the module "Teaching Grammar," and are asked to create their own information-gap activities from materials provided. There is then further brief tutor input on the use of authentic materials, before trainees begin work adapting the ideas introduced so far in the course to a representative sample of the actual materials they will be using in their forthcoming teaching.

One of the most difficult aspects of teaching for new assistants is adapting to departmental norms and expectations with regard to marking, or grading. In some institutions the problem is exacerbated by the uneven application of formal written criteria. In the absence of written guidelines and specific criteria, PGs and FLAs tend to fall back on their own experiences as students (often negative marking within a norm-referenced system) which may or may not be relevant to the practices of their new department. Most teacher trainees find it difficult to "tune in" to senior colleagues' norms and standards, and yet it is clearly important that there should be comparability across parallel groups in a department. Accordingly, one of the core modules of the training program is devoted to exploring the marking of student work.

Following the, by now, standard input–output model, participants are introduced in a plenary session to the various types of assessment (diagnostic, formative, summative, normative, and criterion-referenced) and its different functions (feedback on teaching, grading tool, etc.). At the same time, they are shown the importance of clear, consistent marking criteria and are given a range of general and activity-specific criteria which they discuss briefly. They are then broken up into language-specific groups and given anonymized pieces of undergraduate work (foreign language essays) which have been graded and corrected by full-time academic staff, but from which the grade has been removed. Trainees discuss the relative merits of each piece and agree on a grade; following discussion of the process by which they arrived at their decision, they are told the grade actually awarded to the essay. This process of gradual sensitization to the particular departmental "grading culture" continues after the course; each PG/FLA is allocated an experienced mentor who, besides observing them teach, also grades the first couple of pieces of work with them, thus ensuring an element of standardization. This approach undoubtedly provides much needed guidance and reassurance, although assessment remains a significant cause of concern among PGs and FLAs and some senior colleagues are reluctant to allow assistants too much autonomy in this area.

Besides these sessions, the core program also features two reader modules. The first, "Understanding Language and Language Learning," provides a non-technical introduction to the study of language, theories of second language acquisition, the role of error, learning styles and motivation. The second, "Language-learning Strategies," looks at techniques that research has shown to encourage effective language learning and which teachers need to encourage in their students, including strategies for vocabulary building and developing the various language skills. A third reader module, "The Culture of British Higher Education," is included in the supplementary modules and is aimed particularly at foreign language assistants from abroad who are used to a different university system. It considers, among other things, the language-learning background of British high school graduates, their relative lack of independence in comparison to some other higher education systems, their motivation and expectations, the teaching styles normally employed in British universities, and the structure of degree programs.

Following a period of teaching (anything from six to twelve weeks, depending on semester patterns), participants return for an intensive two- or three-day follow-up course. In the first session, each trainee teacher provides a short presentation on an aspect of his/her class-

room practice which went well and on something which did not work or is causing concern. Tutors are usually extremely impressed by the extent to which novice teachers have enthusiastically implemented the ideas discussed in the first part of the course, making good use of small group settings, employing varied reporting-back strategies, interactive oral activities, imaginative written tasks, original approaches to specific grammatical points, and lively techniques for vocabulary learning designed to encourage retention.

Of at least as much interest are the difficulties that the PGs/FLAs have encountered. Here, too, they usually identify for themselves all the key issues, both generic and language-specific, that make teaching problematic. Problems at the generic level include: deciding what tasks to set and how to ensure they are at the appropriate level; getting students to do assignments both inside and outside the class; fostering a supportive and participative teaching environment; and dealing with silent students/groups. Trainees also identify problems specific to language teaching: expecting undergraduates to handle ideas, linguistic structures, *and* vocabulary all at once in language work; structuring oral activities or traditional conversation classes to ensure the whole class is involved and that real discussion takes place; coping with differing levels of linguistic proficiency in the same class.

While listening to the presentations, members of the course team collate the problem areas under discrete headings and set groups of participants the task of devising teaching strategies to tackle them. Examples of headings from recent iterations of the course are "Getting students to work outside of class," "Motivating students," "Dealing with absenteeism," "Error correction," "Balancing formal grammar with communicative activity," "Getting students to read set [assigned] texts," "Making difficult texts accessible," "Use of the target language," "Integrating language work with content," "Teaching vocabulary." Each group is given feedback on its topic in the form of a presentation and the course tutors contribute to the ensuing discussion. As with the first part of the course, the benefits of group work are quickly apparent: groups come up with a wealth of ideas to tackle the problems which, on their own, participants had previously found insoluble. Materials are again typed up and distributed.

The second part of the training also offers the opportunity to introduce supplementary modules. Two of the most popular are the introduction to information technology and the hands-on session on computer-assisted language learning, in which a range of computer-based and multimedia language learning packages are presented along with suggestions on how best to exploit them. In "Translation as a Learning Process" emphasis is placed on adapting small group teaching techniques to translation from and into the target language. After considering the weaknesses of many traditional approaches to translation, the group is invited to explore alternative, interactive methods, some involving parallel texts and information technology, prior to attempting a group exercise in which trainees have to put into practice the principles outlined in the input session. Finally, the supplementary module on "Approaches to Literary and Cultural Studies" provides a basic guide to the "nuts and bolts" of working with a literary text and an introduction to critical techniques and literary theory. Lack of space precludes discussion of other modules, but further information can be found on the DOPLA Project website (DOPLA 2000: www.bham.ac.uk/dopla) which contains all the training materials, as well as reports on implementation of training from around the consortium.

8. Evaluating the Process

It is in the very nature of the DOPLA program and its reflective approach that participants should be involved in the evaluation of both the "what" and the "how"—that is, the content and the process of the training. Throughout, they are given the opportunity to consider and evaluate both orally and in writing the training sessions and related materials. At the same time, by means of the deliberate and conscious modeling of the course itself on the pedagogical principles and procedures the trainers wish to recommend (sound knowledge base, learner activity, learner interaction, and so on), trainees are constantly encouraged to reflect on and to evaluate *how* the sessions are being delivered.

Ultimately, of course, some form of assessment is required to establish how far the course objectives have been achieved. Accordingly, trainees must compile portfolios including both voluntary and compulsory instruments of reflection and report. Portfolios are increasingly being seen as a central component in the reflective process in all areas of professional educational development (Lyons 1998). They feature prominently in the compulsory teaching and learning programs for new academic staff currently being introduced into UK universities, most of which have either sought or are seeking accreditation of their training by the Institute for Learning and Teaching (ILT 2000: www.ilt.ac.uk). Successful completion of such programs results in ILT membership. The DOPLA project's portfolio is designed to be integrated into these institutional programs and thus to gain trainees Associate Membership of the ILT.

The DOPLA portfolio includes:

- a log or journal
- 10 lesson plans
- 10 self-evaluation sheets for the same lessons
- 2 reports on lessons observed by a departmental/academic mentor
- 1 report on a lesson observed by a peer or fellow trainee
- 1 report on observation of a lesson taught by a peer.

Trainees are encouraged to maintain a teaching log or journal on a regular basis (e.g., twice a week) to record specific events which occurred during their lessons or general issues arising from their teaching so they can review and reflect on them at a later date—and most immediately to support their presentation in the second part of the training course.

The lesson plans must be detailed and include a copy of materials used in a range of classes and at different levels of language proficiency. Trainees then refer to and reflect on these plans in their self-evaluations, each of which has to feature a description of what happened during the class, presented either as a structured list under various headings or as a continuous narrative (see Appendix 3 for sample questions to be addressed in such an evaluation). The self-evaluation should focus on the aims of the lesson, time spent on the various activities, teaching procedures, student response, unexpected difficulties, changes of plan, the most and least effective phases of the lesson, what students learned in the lesson, and what one might do differently on another occasion.

The mentor observations required are recorded on standard tick-box schedules provided in the training pack which focus on (a) introduction of the session, (b) organization, (c) presentation, (d) student participation and interaction, and (e) conclusion of the session. There is provision at the end of the form for the observer to record comments. Before the class, observer and mentor are encouraged to meet briefly to agree to the aims of the session and to allow the teacher to mention any specific aspects of the class he or she wishes the observer to focus on (e.g., use of target language, questioning technique). In a subsequent follow-up meeting, observer and teacher discuss the observation schedule and the teacher can add his or her comments. There is also an optional section for an agreed action plan for improvement. The training pack includes detailed guidelines on the observation process for those with little experience of it.

The observations of fellow novice teachers are intended to be less formal and may be recorded either on the above schedule or in narrative form. Trainees are, in any case, encouraged to go beyond this minimum and make peer observation a regular supportive activity—in effect, the first steps on the road to reflective professional practice.

Conclusion

There can be no doubt that a modern university system needs to ensure thorough and professional preparation of its teaching staff. The first steps have already been taken towards this long overdue professionalization of teaching in UK universities. It will doubtless be many years before all academic staff are accredited members of the Institute for Learning and Teaching; in the meantime, it is essential that support be provided in language departments for the growing number of part-time graduate assistants and the already substantial population of foreign language assistants who, in some academic departments and language centers, are responsible for carrying out the majority of language teaching. The DOPLA approach offers a flexible response to this need and can be adapted to the local requirements of any institution. In emphasizing the close link between the generic and the subject-specific elements of training, it encourages what invariably turns out to be a fruitful collaboration between subject specialists and educational developers. In this sense, the program serves as a model for all academic staff development. Indeed, DOPLA-style training would not be out of place in the professional development of senior faculty, especially as language teaching ability is still rarely a factor in the appointment (or promotion) of such staff.

If it is accepted that teachers need to become reflective practitioners and to reflect constantly on their classroom experience, then much of their initial (and indeed subsequent) training should be experiential, i.e., characterized by close involvement in relevant, practical, and, wherever possible, heuristic activity. By the same token, the training must practice what it preaches, must be what I have called self-reflective, and embody precisely those approaches and activities which it recommends for the language classroom. Sessions thus need to be varied, to involve the trainee actively at every stage and to promote deep approaches to learning; they need to establish clear motivational contexts and to encourage trainee interaction and trainee output.

The trainers on the original DOPLA course frequently make use of an old Chinese proverb: "Tell me and I'll forget. Show me and I may remember. Involve me and I'll understand." While recommending this to trainees as a blueprint for effective language teaching, the course organizers also see in it a neat and pithy summary of what their training concept seeks to achieve.

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APPENDIX 1

Small Group Teaching

Strategies for dealing with problems

1. **The whole group is silent and unresponsive**
   a) Be provocative; use humor; *don't* give the answers.
   b) Break up the whole group into sub-groups; separate any cliques.
   c) Think about why the problem is happening (shyness? over-confidence? passivity? students thinking that just turning up is enough for learning?) and tailor your strategy to your analysis of the problem.

2. **Discussion goes off the point and becomes irrelevant**
   Non-language seminars: Pull back gently, take a look at your watch, keep the atmosphere light and unthreatening. Say you'll come back to their point at a later stage.
   Conversation classes: It doesn't matter as long as students are talking. Keep talk focused on target language; draw people in with invitations (e.g., "Do you want to talk about that?"). Issue a program for the session/semester to everyone and give reminders that the group needs to keep to its schedule.

3. **A student arrives late**
   a) If they are regular offenders, talk to them about it. Talk quietly in class to individuals to bring them up to date (without fuss).
   b) If they are more than 10 minutes late, stop the class, explain that lateness is not acceptable; that you cannot keep repeating yourself, and there is the rest of the class to think about.
   c) Ignore the latecomer.
   d) Make the latecomer apologize and give their excuse in the target language.
   e) Ask those who are present to explain to the latecomer what they have missed.

4. **Students have not done the preparation**
   a) Make sure everyone was clear on what should have been done—could it be that they have misunderstood?
   b) Explain their responsibility to the rest of the class to do the preparation—i.e., they are letting everyone else down.
   c) If they have missed a class, it is their responsibility to find out what needed to be done.
   d) Do one question with them.

5. **Members of the class do not listen to each other**
   a) Write down students' answers on the board—if there are missing points, ask them as a class to fill any gaps.
   b) If they do not listen to each other, signal to the student who is talking to be quiet.
   c) Put a direct question to any student who is not paying attention.
   d) Ask another student to repeat what has just been heard—keep doing this until they get the general idea.
   e) Rephrase/summarize what a student has said, to aid mutual comprehension.
   f) If a discussion is going on for some time, stop and summarize the discussion so far.
   g) Give listeners a task to do while they are listening to a presentation from another student: this will help to structure their thinking and responses.

6. **Students do not answer when you ask a question**
   a) Rephrase/simplify/break it down. If still nothing, make it a simple multiple choice, then ask them to justify their choices.
   b) Ask someone else to model the answer, then go back to the original student.
   c) Make sure the level of questioning is appropriate for the student.

7. **A student dominates the group**
   a) Listen, then stop him/her and invite other answers. Be positive, e.g.: "I've heard your point, let's hear from someone else."
   b) You may need to have a word with the student afterwards to make clear you do not undervalue his/her ideas.
   c) Move your eye contact away to someone else to signal that it is now someone else's turn.
   d) Give him/her the task of getting everyone else to contribute—enlisting the help of dominant students can be very useful.
   e) Get a dominant student to put forth an extreme point of view and ask the others to attack that position.
   f) Make "taking turns" a part of the culture of the class—perhaps even establish that from the start.
   g) Remember to encourage the very bright students and not de-motivate them—you might want to assign them extra work, or suggest other areas of language/literature they can follow up for themselves.

8. People pick on a member of the group in an aggressive way

a) When someone says something politically or personally objectionable, support the person who is being picked on; defuse the situation or distract the group. Emphasize that this is a discussion—and provocative views can be a good way to investigate issues. Make it clear that you do not support the view.

b) You are more likely to get ostracizing: ask some students you trust to look after the student who is being shut out and help them along.

c) Indicate your disapproval (e.g., through body language) when students are unpleasant to very keen students. Point out to them that they should be taking responsibility for their own learning.

d) Encourage the other students to have the confidence to speak up themselves instead of being hostile to someone who is keen.

9. A member of the group is silent and never joins in

a) Talk to the student after the class to find out why: is it shyness? lack of interest? In either case, picking on the student will not help. Try to build confidence in shy people by finding something to praise (e.g., read out a good sentence from their written work). Involve them in pair or group work for a more supportive setting. If in the language lab., have an *individual* conversation to praise and encourage them, and reassure them as much as you can. Ask for work in class that they find comfortable—e.g., prepare something to say, read something out.

b) Some people do like to be quiet in groups—do not force anyone to speak.

APPENDIX 2

Russian lesson worksheet

Introduction

You will now be watching a video recording of an actual language class. In this lesson a group of students has a first lesson in Russian. The first thing to establish is "Where are the learners starting from? What is their knowledge base?" In other words, "What does the teacher know about the learners?"

(a) that they know no Russian

(b) that they have met and done some work together, but that they have not spent a lot of time together as a group. However, some of them know each other quite well.

(c) that they are all linguists

The Russian lesson

Read through the questions on this sheet before you watch the video. This will familiarize you with its contents. As you watch the video, jot down answers to the questions.

(The lesson began at 10.00 a.m.)

10.00–10.10

How does the lesson begin?

How much reinforcement is there at the beginning?

What steps are taken by the teacher to avoid individual embarrassment?

Describe the actions and facial expressions of the teacher.

How many phrases are introduced in the first ten minutes?

10.10–10.20

In what ways does the teacher revise and reinforce what has been done?

10.20–10.30

What new phase of the lesson begins?

What is the first way the teacher checks for recognition of new words?

She introduces a new phrase—how do the learners understand what it means?

How does the teacher get students to practice the new material?

Do students have any control over the material they choose to use?

How is the knowledge tested?

What is the final stage?

10.30–10.32
What is the final review stage?

General points
What attitudes do the learners show to the tasks they are asked to do?

How would you describe the atmosphere of the class?

What is the aptitude of the learners for the tasks they are asked to perform?

How does the teacher behave towards the members of the class?

Assess the lesson with regard to:

- structure of knowledge base
- motivational context
- learner activity
- learner interaction.

If the learners had not been linguists and had not met before, were there any points in the lesson that might have been done differently?

APPENDIX 3

Lesson evaluation sheet

These suggestions are designed to help you think about points for lesson evaluation

1. What were the aims of the session?	What were you hoping to achieve in this class?
	What were students supposed to be able to do afterwards that they could not do before?
	Which grammar point/vocabulary were you hoping students would learn?
	What were you hoping to assess?
2. Were aims achieved?	Were aims wholly or partly achieved? Were aims appropriate to the class?
	Was content covered?
	Could students understand/reproduce/use the language?
	What language exactly have they learned?
	What did any assessment show?
3. Were methods suitable?	Relative success of question and answer technique; way visuals, OHP, etc., were used; pair work, group work, drills, games, information gap activities, balance of teacher-led session and student-centred work.
	Were your methods appropriate to the class/time of week/time of day?
	Was the balance of support/challenge right for these students?
4. Were class management procedures effective?	Orderly start/finish to lesson, including controlled change of activity; effective organization of learning groups; clarity of instructions; handling interruptions; fostering relationships and equal opportunities.
5. Was the use of resources effective?	Use of black/white board, text books, worksheets, overhead projector, cassette player, flash-cards, computers.
	Did you make the most effective use of them?
	Did you make effective use of human resources, i.e., the students themselves?

6. Next lesson targets and follow-up	What should be planned next? Practicing content in a different form? Add in more new material?
	Mark work/listen to recordings/target three or four students during the lesson and act on feedback?
	Specific targets for next class? Not just in terms of content but in terms of your own behavior/approach.

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